

Laying Down Our Life



The Key to a Successful Marriage (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be back with you again today. Yesterday I spoke to you about the key to a successful marriage, the Bible's revelation that marriage is a covenant. Basically, this means two things: first of all, it means commitment. There is no covenant without a commitment. Marriage is not an experiment, it begins with a commitment. Those who bypass commitment cannot find God's purpose for marriage.

Secondly, in a covenant God sets the terms. He does not leave it to man to decide on what basis that a marriage will be ordered that He has laid down certain specific simple terms.

So today I am going to go on with this theme and explain to you in a practical way just how the understanding of covenant can make all the difference between success and failure in marriage. And in your marriage, particularly.

The words "covenant" and "testament" are very important in the whole revelation of the Bible. Actually, the Bible comes to us in the form of two testaments, the Old Testament and the New. The same words that is translated "testament" in many other places is translated "covenant." So we always need to bear in mind that a testament is a covenant and a covenant is a testament. The English translation sometimes obscures that fact for some Bible readers.

Now the next fact about a covenant is that in the Bible it always required a sacrifice. A covenant could not be made without a sacrifice. And a sacrifice meant the taking of a life, the laying down of a life. In the Old Testament, there was a rather strange method by which people entered into covenant with one another. They would take the sacrificial animals, whatever they might be, they would slay them, cut them into halves, lay the two halves opposite one another and then walk together through the two halves of the slain animal. There is a very interesting example of this in Genesis 15, where the Lord Himself in this way made a covenant with Abraham.

Later on this week I'm going to speak more fully about that but just lay hold of this fact for the time being that a covenant is based on a sacrifice and entering into a covenant is passing with the people whom you're making the covenant with, through the sacrifice. In other words, the way into the

covenant is through a life laid down. That's what the sacrifice represents.

Now you may think this is simply true in the Old Testament but that's not so, because in the epistle to the Hebrews, in the 9th chapter, verses 16–17, the writer reinforces this in the New Testament. This is what he says:

> "For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives."

Now that is a very, I would say, startling statement. A covenant is only operative, it's only valid, when the one who makes the covenant is dead.

Now for us, as Christians, the great and final sacrifice is the death of Jesus. There are many passages of the New Testament that speak about this, for instance in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, Paul says:

> "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this that one died for all, therefore all died and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

In other words, the sacrifice on which the New Covenant is based is the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf and His death, when we accept it by faith, becomes our death. One died for all, therefore all were dead.

Christ did not die actually for Himself, He died for us. He died as our representative. His death becomes our death. Romans 6:8–11, Paul says:

> "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

So you see the essential teaching about the death of Jesus Christ is that it was the last and final sacrifice for sin and that His death was substitutionary, that He died for us and so we enter into the New Covenant, not through two halves of a slain animal, but through the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. But the covenant is only valid if we accept His death as our death. A covenant is not yet valid as long as the one who makes it lives. Jesus died to make the covenant with us but the covenant only becomes effective in our lives when we reckon ourselves to be dead with Him. His death becomes our death. He is the sacrifice through whom we pass into the New Covenant.

How does this principle of covenant apply particularly to marriage? We have said that a covenant is valid only when the one who makes the covenant has died. So if marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, how does that apply? Well, the great basic principle in the covenant of marriage for Christians is based on the death of Jesus. His death was our death. It's through Him we enter into this covenant. And this applies specifically to the covenant of marriage.

Now I have explained this as clearly as I am able in my book, The Marriage Covenant, and so I am going to read a few paragraphs from that book because it says what I want to say just as clearly as I am able to say it. So I am reading now from my book, The Marriage Covenant.

> "The sacrifice upon which the covenant of Christian marriage is based is the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. He is the sacrifice through which by faith a man and a woman can pass into the relationship of marriage as God Himself ordained that it should be. Just as the Lord and Abram passed between the pieces of the slain animals, so in marriage a man and woman pass through the death of Jesus Christ on their behalf into a totally new life and a totally new relationship which would have been impossible without the death of Jesus Christ. The covenant of Christian marriage is made at the foot of the cross.
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> There are three successive phases in the outworking of this relationship. First, a life is laid down. Each lays down his life for the other. The husband looks back at Christ's death on the cross, and says: 'That death was my death. When I came through the cross, I died. Now I am no longer living for myself.' The wife likewise looks at the cross and says the same: 'That death was my death. When I came through the cross, I died. Now I am no longer living for myself.'
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> Henceforth, each holds nothing back from the other. Everything the husband has is for the wife. Everything

> the wife has is for the husband. No reservations, nothing held back. It is a merger, not a partnership.
>
> Second, out of that death comes a new life. Each now lives out that new life in and through the other. The husband says to the wife: 'My life is in you. I am living out my life through you. You are the expression of what I am.' Likewise the wife says to the husband: 'My life is in you. I am living out my life through you. You are the expression of what I am.'
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> Third, the covenant is consummated by physical union, and this in turn brings forth fruit which continues the new life that each has been willing to share with the other. In the whole realm of living creatures, God has ordained this basic principle: without union there can be no fruit. Covenant leads to shared life and fruitfulness; life that is not shared remains sterile and fruitless.
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> This approach to marriage, which sees it in terms of a covenant, is very different from the attitude with which most people today enter into marriage. Basically, the attitude of our contemporary culture is, 'What can I get? What is there in this for me?' I believe that any relationship approached with this attitude is doomed to end in failure. The one who approaches marriage as a covenant does not ask, 'What can I get?' Rather he asks, 'What can I give?' And he goes on to answer his own question: 'I give my life. I lay it down for you, and then I find my new life in you.' This applies equally to each party—to the husband and to the wife. To the natural mind this sounds ridiculous. Yet it is, in fact, the secret of real life, real happiness, and real love."

So much for my reading from my book, The Marriage Covenant. Let me just take a moment or two to wrap that up for you before I close.

There is a life to lose and a life to find. As long as you enter into marriage holding on to your own life, you will not find the life that God has for you in that covenant. It is a step of faith. You have got to lay down your life, in faith, and find a new life; a life that is different, a life that comes in union, a life that you cannot have on your own. Each party to the marriage has to make that step of faith.

The key word, again, is commitment. It is not an experiment. You have to make a commitment. And the key fact is this: that the commitment releases God's grace. Without God's grace marriage will never work. But God does not release His grace into a marriage until both parties have made that commitment. And out of God's grace come the resources needed to make the marriage work.

Now, I've got to close for today but I'll be back again with you tomorrow. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the end purpose of marriage. What is it that is made possible through marriage and cannot be attained in any other way?

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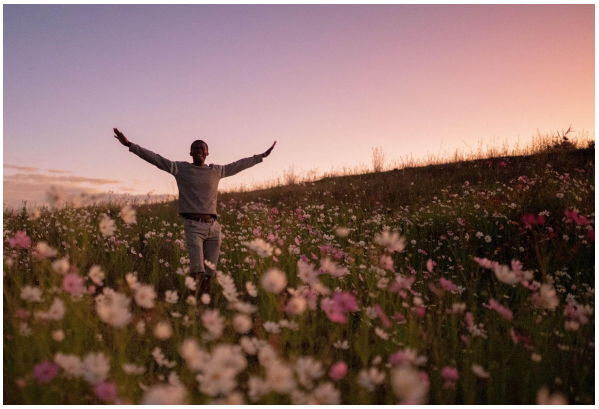
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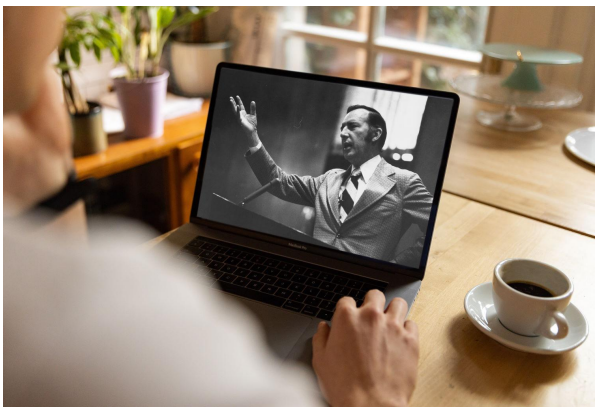
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